

## The Mother Sauce

This is the ur-sauce, ubiquitous in the nineteenth-century United States, and still found in conservative places like eastern North Carolina that don't cotton to this new-fangled "ketchup" goop. Steven Raichlen calls it "the original kick-ass sauce, designed to complement pork, not camouflage it." In fact, in the old days it was used with all kinds of meat, not just pork. Wesley Jones, a former slave from South Carolina, remembered using it in the 1850s to "anoint" goats, hogs, sheep, and sides of beef.

Often some melted butter or lard was added to the mix to replace the fat lost in cooking, and of course everyone dropped in a pinch of "secret ingredients." (Mr. Jones added some sage, coriander, basil, onion, and garlic.) We're less likely now to regard lost fat as a bad thing, and the secret ingredients were probably as much for mystique as for flavor, so most people these days use something like the recipe below. There's one mutation you might want to consider, however. "Some folks drop a little sugar in it," Mr. Jones reported, and replacing the black pepper with sugar or molasses produces a sweet-and-sour version that many people prefer to the fierce original.

Use this with pulled pork shoulder and you can pretend you're at the front end of an East Carolina whole-hog pig-picking.

Makes about a gallon.

1 gallon cider vinegar  
¾ cup crushed red pepper  
¼ cup kosher salt  
2 tablespoons cayenne pepper  
2 tablespoons ground black pepper (or 1 cup packed brown sugar – see above)

Mix the ingredients and let stand at least 4 hours. Use this as a mop while cooking and then serve it as a table sauce to be sprinkled (sparingly!) over the pulled or chopped meat.